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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
REVIEW AUTHORITY: JOHN L MILLS  
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ALL POSTS FOR PAO, USSOCOM FOR POLAD

E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: OPRC, KPAO  
SUBJECT: WHA GUIDANCE, APRIL 16, 2002

SUMMARY OF CONTENTS:  
WHA PRESS GUIDANCE, APRIL 16 (VENEZUELA)  
END SUMMARY.

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WHA PRESS GUIDANCE, APRIL 16, 2002:  
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-- VENEZUELA: MEETINGS, U.S. INVOLVEMENT, LEGITIMACY,  
REACTION TO CHAVEZ SPEECH, ARRESTS OF CARMONA ET AL --

Q: DID U.S. OFFICIALS MEET WITH VENEZUELAN OPPOSITION  
OFFICIALS PRIOR TO THE APRIL 11 REMOVAL OF PRESIDENT CHAVEZ  
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FROM POWER?

A: U.S. OFFICIALS HAVE MET WITH A BROAD SPECTRUM OF  
VENEZUELAN OVER THE PAST SEVERAL MONTHS BOTH IN CARACAS AND  
IN WASHINGTON. U.S. OFFICIALS MET WITH BUSINESS COMMUNITY  
REPRESENTATIVES, LABOR UNION OFFICIALS, CATHOLIC CHURCH  
LEADERS, OPPOSITION POLITICAL LEADERS, AND A WIDE ARRAY OF  
VENEZUELAN GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS.

IF ASKED:

IN THE COURSE OF NORMAL DIPLOMATIC CONTACTS, U.S. OFFICIALS  
MET WITH PEDRO CARMONA, THE PRESIDENT OF THE VENEZUELAN  
FEDERATION OF CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE (FEDECAMARAS).

OUR MESSAGE TO ALL VENEZUELAN CONTACTS HAS BEEN CONSISTENT.  
THE POLITICAL SITUATION IN VENEZUELA IS ONE FOR VENEZUELAN  
TO RESOLVE PEACEFULLY, DEMOCRATICALLY AND CONSTITUTIONALLY.  
WE EXPLICITLY TOLD ALL OF OUR VENEZUELAN INTERLOCUTORS ON  
NUMEROUS OCCASIONS AND AT MANY LEVELS THAT UNDER NO  
CIRCUMSTANCES WOULD THE UNITED STATES SUPPORT ANY  
UNCONSTITUTIONAL, UNDEMOCRATIC EFFORT, SUCH AS COUP, TO  
REMOVE PRESIDENT CHAVEZ FROM POWER.

Q: WAS THE UNITED STATES INVOLVED IN THE EFFORT TO REMOVE  
VENEZUELAN PRESIDENT CHAVEZ FROM POWER?

A: ABSOLUTELY NOT.

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Q: WHY THEN DID THE U.S. NOT CONDEMN THE REMOVAL OF  
PRESIDENT CHAVEZ FROM POWER ON FRIDAY, APRIL 12 AND CALL FOR  
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HIS IMMEDIATE REINSTATEMENT?

A: OUR RESPONSE TO THE SITUATION IN VENEZUELA ON APRIL 12  
LAID OUT THE FACTS AS WE KNEW THEM TO BE DURING A VERY  
CONFUSING TIME. THOSE FACTS WERE THAT HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS  
OF VENEZUELAN DEMONSTRATED PEACEFULLY AGAINST THE CHAVEZ  
GOVERNMENT, THAT THE CHAVEZ GOVERNMENT RESPONDED WITH A  
CRACK-DOWN AGAINST PROTESTORS AND THE INDEPENDENT MEDIA, THAT  
PRESIDENT CHAVEZ WAS REPORTED TO HAVE DISMISSED HIS VICE  
PRESIDENT AND CABINET AND RESIGNED, AND THAT A TRANSITIONAL  
GOVERNMENT HAD ASSUMED POWERS AND CALLED FOR NEW ELECTIONS.

OUR POSITION WAS THAT THIS SITUATION SHOULD BE RESOLVED  
PEACEFULLY AND DEMOCRATICALLY, AND IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE  
INTER-AMERICAN DEMOCRATIC CHARTER.

WE FOLLOWED THIS STATEMENT BY HELPING TO DRAFT A RESOLUTION  
AT THE ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES (OAS) INVOKING ARTICLE  
20 OF THE INTER-AMERICAN DEMOCRATIC CHARTER. ARTICLE 20  
ALLOWS FOR ANY OAS MEMBER STATE (OR THE SECRETARY GENERAL) TO  
CONVOKE THE OAS PERMANENT COUNCIL TO UNDERTAKE A "COLLECTIVE  
ASSESSMENT OF THE SITUATION" WHEN THERE HAS BEEN "AN  
UNCONSTITUTIONAL ALTERATION OF THE CONSTITUTIONAL REGIME THAT  
SERIOUSLY IMPAIRS THE DEMOCRATIC ORDER IN A MEMBER STATE."  
WITH THAT OBJECTIVE, OUR REPRESENTATIVE TO THE OAS CLEARLY  
STATED THAT THE SO-CALLED "PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT" HAD YET TO  
DEMONSTRATE THAT THEY ARE THE "LEGALLY CONSTITUTED CIVILIAN  
AUTHORITY." OUR DELEGATION ALSO SAID THAT THE OAS MUST  
RIGOROUSLY INSIST THAT VENEZUELAN AUTHORITIES RESPECT THE  
ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF DEMOCRACY.

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WE JOINED THE CONSENSUS TO SUPPORT THE OAS RESOLUTION OF  
APRIL 13 THAT CONDEMNED THE "ALTERATION OF CONSTITUTIONAL  
ORDER," CALLED FOR THE "NORMALIZATION OF THE DEMOCRATIC  
INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK IN VENEZUELA, WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF  
THE INTER-AMERICAN DEMOCRATIC CHARTER," AND CALLED FOR THE  
OAS SECRETARY GENERAL TO CONDUCT A FACT-FINDING MISSION TO  
VENEZUELA.

WE ARE PLEASED THAT THE HEMISPHERE IS ENGAGED IN SUPPORTING  
DEMOCRACY IN VENEZUELA. WE TRUST THAT OUR HEMISPHERIC  
PARTNERS WILL CONTINUE THIS ENGAGEMENT TO ENSURE THAT

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VENEZUELA RESPECTS DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS AND PROCESSES AND FOLLOWS THROUGH ON ITS COMMITMENTS FOR NATIONAL DIALOGUE AND RECONCILIATION.

Q: IS THE GOVERNMENT OF VENEZUELAN PRESIDENT HUGO CHAVEZ LEGITIMATE?

A: YES. THE VENEZUELAN PEOPLE FREELY AND FAIRLY ELECTED HUGO CHAVEZ TO BE PRESIDENT OF VENEZUELA IN DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS IN DECEMBER 1998 AND JULY 2000. LEGITIMACY EARNED THROUGH ELECTIONS MUST BE MAINTAINED AND NURTURED THROUGH DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE THAT RESPECTS THE ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF DEMOCRACY. PRESIDENT CHAVEZ'S CALL FOR NATIONAL DIALOGUE AND RECONCILIATION IS A WELCOME INITIAL INITIATIVE TOWARD FULLY RESTORING THE ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF DEMOCRACY.

Q: DO YOU HAVE ANY REACTION TO PRESIDENT CHAVEZ'S APRIL 15 SPEECH?

A: WE WELCOME PRESIDENT CHAVEZ'S CALLS FOR ROUNDTABLES OF  
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NATIONAL DIALOGUE AND RECONCILIATION. THIS IS AN IMPORTANT FIRST STEP IN RECLAIMING VENEZUELA'S DEMOCRACY. WE URGE THE VENEZUELAN GOVERNMENT TO SUPPORT FULLY THE ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES (OAS) SECRETARY GENERAL'S FACT-FINDING MISSION TO VENEZUELA. THROUGH ITS GOOD OFFICES, THE OAS CAN PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE BY SUPPORTING A BROAD AND INCLUSIVE NATIONAL DIALOGUE THAT PROMOTES RECONCILIATION AND STRENGTHENING THE ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF DEMOCRACY IN VENEZUELA.

Q: DO YOU HAVE ANY COMMENT REGARDING THE DETENTION OF PROVISIONAL PRESIDENT PEDRO CARMONA AND THE MILITARY OFFICERS THAT SUPPORTED HIS GOVERNMENT?

A: IT IS OUR UNDERSTANDING THAT PEDRO CARMONA, INDIVIDUALS WHO WORKED WITH CARMONA, AND MILITARY LEADERS THAT SUPPORTED CARMONA HAVE BEEN DETAINED. AS WE WOULD WITH ANY VENEZUELAN CITIZEN, WE URGE THE VENEZUELAN GOVERNMENT TO RESPECT THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF THESE INDIVIDUALS AND TO HANDLE THEIR CASES IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF JUSTICE. PRESIDENT CHAVEZ HAS PROMISED TO RESPECT THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF THOSE PERSONS WHO WERE DETAINED. WE WELCOME THIS PROMISE, AND TRUST THAT PRESIDENT CHAVEZ WILL FOLLOW THROUGH ON IT.  
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